

ABERDEEN CITY COUNCIL

COMMITTEE	Communities, Housing and Public Protection Committee
DATE	13 January 2026
EXEMPT	No
CONFIDENTIAL	No
REPORT TITLE	Graffiti in Aberdeen
REPORT NUMBER	CR&E/26/005
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR	Gale Beattie
CHIEF OFFICER	Mark Reilly
REPORT AUTHOR	Steven Shaw
TERMS OF REFERENCE	1.1.1

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To update committee on the current challenges in dealing with removing graffiti in Aberdeen and also what steps are required to be taken to help reduce the graffiti problem.
- 1.2 This includes the partnership work with the Community Safety Partnership (CSP) being developed regarding efficient reporting, data / evidence gathering and enforcement.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

That the Committee: -

- 2.1 Notes the demand being placed on, and the work being carried out by, Environmental Services to remove graffiti in Aberdeen;
- 2.2 Notes the current work being undertaken by the Community Safety Partnership (CSP) to reduce graffiti and the steps being proposed to gather data and evidence to help tackle the problem; and
- 2.3 Instructs the Chief Officer - Operations, following consultation with the Community Safety Manager, to bring a report to the Communities, Housing and Public Protection Committee in the Summer 2026 to give an update on the progress being made.

3. CURRENT SITUATION

- 3.1 At the Council meeting on 2 July 2025, a Notice of Motion was submitted by Councillor Bonsell in the following terms:-

That Council:-

- (1) Shares the pride of Aberdonians in our city, including its beautiful granite architecture, and wants everyone who lives, works, studies or visits here to see Aberdeen at its best;
- (2) Understands the increasing concerns of residents, businesses and community organisations that graffiti is defacing too many buildings, walls and other structures in the city centre and across Aberdeen;
- (3) Recognises the efforts of Council officers and Police Scotland in addressing the issue of graffiti, for instance, through their reporting systems, graffiti removal service, and diversionary activities, including the graffiti art wall in Sunnybank Park;
- (4) Commends citizens for their vigilance in spotting and reporting graffiti to the Council and Police Scotland;
- (5) Appreciates the positive contribution of NuArt Aberdeen to our cityscape and looks forward to the return of this cultural festival in 2026;
- (6) Instructs the Chief Officer - Operations, following consultation with the Community Safety Manager, to bring a report to the Communities, Housing and Public Protection Committee on 11 November 2025 on current efforts to reduce graffiti in Aberdeen and what more could be done, including partnership working with Police Scotland, local businesses, and community organisations.

3.2 The Council Decision resolved to approve the Notice of Motion subject to an amended part (6) as follows:-

- (6) Instructs the Chief Officer - Operations, following consultation with the Community Safety Manager, to bring a report to an appropriate Communities, Housing and Public Protection Committee on current efforts to reduce graffiti in Aberdeen and what more could be done, including partnership working with Police Scotland, local businesses, and community organisations.

3.3 Graffiti Removal

3.3.1 Although some graffiti can and has been viewed as artistic, if it is produced on property without the owner's permission it is a criminal offence. In Scotland, graffiti is covered by two separate criminal offences. Firstly, it could fall under the common law offence of 'malicious mischief'. Secondly, it is a form of vandalism, which is dealt with by section 52 of the Criminal Law (Consolidation) (Scotland) Act 1995 ("the 1995 Act"). Section 52(1) of the 1995 Act states that "*...any person who, without reasonable excuse, wilfully or recklessly destroys or damages any property belonging to another shall be guilty of the offence of vandalism.*"

Section 58 of the Antisocial Behaviour etc. (Scotland) Act 2004 provides that;

Where it appears to a local authority that—

(a) a relevant surface in its area has been defaced by graffiti; and
(b) the defacement is—
 (i) detrimental to the amenity of the locality; or
 (ii) offensive,
the authority may serve a graffiti removal notice on any responsible person.

A “relevant surface” is either the surface of a public road or any building, structure, apparatus, plant or other object on such a road or, in some circumstances, the surface of land owned, occupied or controlled by a relevant body (or of property on such land). A “relevant body” means an educational institution or a statutory undertaker.

3.3.2 Graffiti and tagging are detrimental to the urban environment and can increase peoples’ fear of crime. The Broken Window theory advocates that environmental degradation spirals when a building or area appears uncared for. It is suggested that degradation can be avoided by dealing with instances of ‘broken windows’ e.g. vandalism, littering, flytipping promptly, thereby showing the area is cared for.

3.3.3 Although there is no statutory obligation for Aberdeen City Council to remove graffiti from its properties, parks and highways, the Council has accepted responsibility for the removal. This work is undertaken by Environmental Services.

3.3.4 Environmental Services aims to remove problem graffiti quickly to reduce the perceived negative effects on the community and break the associated cycle of criminality. However, the levels of graffiti in Aberdeen have reached such an extent that the service is not able to meet the demand for removing it. The service simply does not have the resources to remove the current level of graffiti seen across Aberdeen.

Currently the service only has the capacity to deal with graffiti that is formally reported. The service does not have the resources to be proactive and clear all the tags they see.

3.3.5 Environmental Services has a team tasked with graffiti removal. The team consists of two Environmental staff trained in the removal of graffiti. An Environmental Chargehand and an Area Supervisor are also trained in carrying out graffiti removal. The team are not dealing with graffiti removal full time as their work also covers power washing jobs, cleaning of bin rooms and various other city centre deep cleaning jobs.

3.3.6 Removal methods include washing, chemical wash and painting.

- Washing is as simple as the name suggests and purely involves using a power washer to remove the graffiti. This can be in hot or cold water.
- To chemically clean graffiti, water-soluble chemicals are applied, then washed off with a power washer.
- Painting is used to cover graffiti if the original surface was painted and would be damaged by the use of a power washer. It is also used on large pieces of graffiti where the cost of chemical removal outweighs its benefits. Where

painting is necessary, the team endeavour to attain a reasonable colour match, although an exact match cannot always be guaranteed.

3.3.7 Graffiti that Environmental Services has a responsibility to clear from properties etc owned by Aberdeen City Council is targeted for removal within 16 working weeks of receipt of the report or complaint. Where private property is affected by graffiti the Council will liaise with the owners/occupiers to arrange removal. Private work is charged for.

3.3.8 Where graffiti is judged offensive it will be removed within 15 days from the receipt of the report. The following criteria is used when judging if graffiti is seen as offensive:

- Offensive language
- Language of a politically/racially/religiously insulting or inciting nature
- A hate statement
- A graphically explicit image
- A visually or textually offensive image
- Libellous, or potentially libellous, statements.

3.3.9 To date in 2025 there have been 348 instances of graffiti reported. 17 of these reports remain outstanding. 41 of the reports have been marked as offensive and cleared.

3.3.10 Graffiti and other forms of vandalism can be reported through the Council's website.

All graffiti reports are entered into a single database for removal. Information on the job such as location, removal date, materials used and time taken are all recorded.

3.3.11 Where required, Environmental Services will work with partners such as Aberdeen Inspired and the Community Safety Partnership to encourage and support enforcement activities with the aim of preventing future incidents.

3.3.12 Aberdeen Inspired, businesses and local communities have been very supportive of the Environmental Services team. These partners want to continue their support and help where they can to remove graffiti and reduce the incidents of tagging. Discussion with these partners will continue in 2026.

3.4 Intelligence gathering and supporting insights and enforcement

3.4.1 The CSP is currently developing an analytical dashboard to enhance intelligence gathering and support insights and enforcement. This dashboard will combine information from Aberdeen City Council services and Police Scotland, along with data collected by partner teams, to create a comprehensive intelligence picture. By integrating these sources, the approach aims to strengthen the evidence base and provide greater support for enforcement operations.

- 3.4.2 In addition to this development, CSP continues to host a daily multi-agency meeting where all incidents reported in the previous 24-hour period are reviewed. Graffiti-related incidents have now been added to the scope of these discussions, ensuring that this issue receives appropriate attention and coordinated responses.
- 3.4.3 The CSP leads a monthly City Centre Anti-Social Behaviour meeting attended by CSP partners and key external stakeholders, including Aberdeen Inspired and local businesses. This forum provides an opportunity to share feedback, raise concerns, and monitor progress on city centre priorities. Graffiti will now feature as a standing agenda item within these meetings, reinforcing our commitment to addressing this issue collaboratively.
- 3.4.4 Aberdeen City Council strives to improve the total environment for its citizens and the removal of graffiti is one step towards achieving that goal. This will be done through the use of an efficient reporting system that enables the quick removal of graffiti along with prevention measures and partnership working.

4. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 There are no direct financial implications arising from the recommendations of this report.

5. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 There are no direct legal implications arising from the recommendations of this report.

6. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 There are no direct environmental implications arising from the recommendations of this report.

7. RISK

The assessment of risk contained within the table below is considered to be consistent with the Council's Risk Appetite Statement.

Category	Risks	Primary Controls/Control Actions to achieve Target Risk Level	*Target Risk Level (L, M or H) <small>*taking into account controls/control actions</small>	*Does Target Risk Level Match Appetite Set?
Strategic Risk	No enforcement action and service	Improve evidence and data gathering.	Medium	Yes

	unable to meet demand on clearing. Problem increases			
Compliance	No enforcement action and service unable to meet demand on clearing. Problem increases.	Improve evidence and data gathering.	Medium	Yes
Operational	The service does not have the resources to meet demand.	Team will only deal with formal reports. There is not the capacity for the team to be proactive. Service will reach a point when only offensive graffiti can be tackled.	Medium	Yes
Financial	The revenue budget in place does not meet the requirements of the demand.	Team will only deal with formal reports. There is not the capacity for the team to be proactive. Service will reach a point when only offensive graffiti can be tackled.	Medium	Yes
Reputational	Aberdeen seen as a target for vandals and crime.	Promote awareness of challenges faced.	Medium	Yes
Environment / Climate	Risk of areas looking run down and neglected which could attract other environmental problems such as litter and flytipping.	Team will only deal with formal reports. There is not the capacity for the team to be proactive. Service will reach a point when only offensive graffiti can be tackled.	Medium	Yes

8. OUTCOMES

COUNCIL DELIVERY PLAN 2025-26	
Aberdeen City Council Policy Statement <u>Working in Partnership for Aberdeen</u>	<p>Impact of Report</p> <p>The proposals within this report support the delivery of the following aspect of the policy statement:- A Safer Aberdeen. Aberdeen City is a welcoming, peaceful and safe place to live, work and visit. We will continue to do all we can to protect individuals and communities from harm caused by crime and antisocial behaviour. Working together we will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Support, encourage and assist the city's Community Policing Teams, Scottish Fire and Rescue Service and other community safety partners. - Improve community safety by continuing to invest in the Council's Anti-Social Behaviour Investigations Team, in City Wardens, in community safety projects. - Promote and develop city centre community safety through sustained partnership work with Street Pastors, the private sector and others and by continuing effective measures including Taxi Marshalls. - Tackle fly-tipping and establish a squad to tackle illegal graffiti across the city.
<u>Local Outcome Improvement Plan</u>	
Prosperous Place Stretch Outcomes	15. 26% of Aberdeen's area will be protected and/or managed for nature and 60% of people report they feel that spaces and buildings are well cared for by 2026.
Regional and City Strategies	The proposal within this report supports a range of regional and city-wide strategies including. Regional and Local Transport Strategies, Strategic and Local Development Plan, Local Outcome Improvement Plan, Aberdeen Adapts and the Local Housing Strategy.

9. IMPACT ASSESSMENTS

Assessment	Outcome
Integrated Impact Assessment	It is confirmed by the Chief Officer – Operations, 11/12/25, that no Integrated Impact Assessment is required.
Data Protection Impact Assessment	No identifiable data is included in this report therefore a DPIA is not required.

Other	N/A
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10. BACKGROUND PAPERS

10.1 N/A

11. APPENDICES

11.1 N/A

12. REPORT AUTHOR CONTACT DETAILS

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